DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 408 CS 014 158

AUTHOR Bernstein, Leslie; Ellis, Nicole
TITLE There Are Three Sounds in the Word CAT: How Phonemic Awareness Works To Facilitate Reading Acquisition.
PUB DATE 2000-10-00
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; *Beginning Reading; *Literacy; Literature Reviews; *Phonics; Primary Education; Reading Readiness
IDENTIFIERS *Alphabetic Principle; *Phonemic Awareness

ABSTRACT

To answer the question of how phonemic awareness works to facilitate reading acquisition, this paper explores the fundamental connection between phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, and phonics in learning to read. The paper undertook a literature review to prove that phonemic awareness is an essential element in the path to literacy. It found that the evidence reveals that phonemic awareness can significantly bridge the critical gap between inadequate preparation for literacy and success in beginning reading. It also found that without an understanding about spoken language, students will have difficulty with the alphabetic principle and the letter-sound correspondence (phonics), all of which are necessary for success in reading. (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 448 408

CS

There are three sounds in the word CAT
How Phonemic Awareness Works to Facilitate Reading Acquisition

Leslie Bernstein
Nicole Ellis

Dominican University of California
School of Education
San Rafael, CA
FALL 2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

L. Bernstein
N. Ellis

CS 014 158

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

Mrs. Lewis has several students in her third grade class who are having difficulty reading. She decides to assess them individually. "Michael, do fish and dish rhyme?" "No," said Michael. "Jennifer, how many sounds do you hear in sit?" "Two," replies Jennifer. "Juan, what word would we have if we added a /g/ sound to row?" "I don't know," he answers back. The above assessments reveal to Mrs. Lewis that her students' problems in reading are directly related to their lack of phonemic awareness.

Phonemic awareness is "the ability to examine language independent of meaning, to attend to sounds in the context of a word, and to manipulate component sounds" (Fitzpatrick, 1997, pg. 5). To be more specific, phonemic awareness refers to an understanding of phonemes, the smallest units of sound that make up the speech stream (International Reading Association Board of Directors, 1998). It is not phonics. Phonemic awareness focuses on spoken language while phonics connects the sounds to the letters for written language.

Statement of the Problem

How does phonemic awareness work to facilitate reading acquisition? To answer this question, our paper will explore the fundamental connection between phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle and phonics in learning to read.

Literature Review

Children learn to speak before they learn to read or write. As children develop

their oral language skills, they learn speech sounds that are derived from the English alphabet. Phonemic awareness is important because English is based on the alphabetic principle. The alphabetic principle is the "twenty-six letters of the alphabet representing forty-four sounds of oral language. All English words are composed of various combinations of the two" (Wilson, 1998, pg. 4 from Rigby, 1997). Griffith and Olsen (1992) state that phonemic awareness is critical in learning to read and write an alphabetic language since our system of writing maps to phonemes. "Early on, teachers want students to understand that all twenty-six of those strange little symbols that comprise the alphabet are worth learning and discriminating, one from the other, because each stands for at least one of the sounds that occur in spoken words" (Adams, 1990, pg. 76).

For languages that are not based on the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness is irrelevant. Chinese and Japanese for example, are logographic languages. Logographic symbols have meaning in and of themselves. In an alphabetic language visual symbols have no meaning. Instead, the symbols or letters represent sounds (Snider, 1995, pg. 2). "It may be that children without phonemic awareness are approaching English like Chinese" (or Japanese), "memorizing whole words and failing to acquire the alphabetic principle. This strategy will limit their potential to become skilled readers" (Snider, 1995, pg. 3). Success in reading aquisition is dependent on a knowledge of letters and phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990).

Since the first form of literacy a child masters is the ability to speak, phonemic awareness can be viewed as the first component to reading literacy (Wilson, 1998). "Before children can identify a letter that stands for a sound, they must be able to hear that individual sound in a word... the path to phonemic awareness is sequential. This

awareness is not innate, it must be acquired" (Fitzpatrick, 1997). Adams has identified five levels of phonemic awareness:

> First, is the appreciation of sounds in spoken language as evidenced by recitation of nursery rhymes. Second, is the ability to compare and contrast sounds in words by grouping words with similar or dissimilar sounds at the beginnning, middle, or end of a work. Third, is the ability to blend and split syllables. Fourth is phonemic segmentation or the ability to isolate individual sounds in syllables. Fifth is the ability to manipulate phonemes by omitting and deleting phonemes to make new words (Snider, 1995, pg. 2 from Adams, 1990).

"Phonemic awareness seems to be the "missing element" which will help a child move naturally into the reading phase of the overall language acquisition picture as he did into the speaking phase"(Wilson, 1998, pg. 3 from Sumpter & Szitar, 1993).

Many researchers have found that phonics instruction is not beneficial without a knowledge of phonemic awareness. "Children must be able to hear and manipulate oral sound patterns before they can relate them to print. Phonics instruction builds on a child's ability to segment and blend together sounds he or she hears" (Fitzpatrick, 1997, pg. 6). Roger Sensenbaugh writes, "...teaching students letter sound correspondence is meaningless if the students do not have a solid visual familiarity with the individual letters and if they do not understand that the sound (which can be complex, shifting, and notoriously rule breaking) paired with those letters are what make up words" (Sensenbaugh, 1996, pg. 2 from Adams, 1990). Children without phonemic awareness who attempt to memorize visual wholes may not understand how to use letter-sound correspondences. This accounts for children who laboriously sound out a word (e.g. "/c/ /a/ /t/"), only to take a wild guess ("cheetah!") or who produce totally unrecognizable words in their invented spelling" (Snider, 1995, pg. 3). An effective phonics program builds on a child's concept of print and on a foundation of phonemic awareness (Wilson,

1998, pg. 9 from Stahl, 1992).

Phonemic awareness and discrimination among phonemes is imperative for success in reading. "For over 50 years discussions have continued regarding the relation between a child's awareness of the sounds of spoken words and his or her ability to read. Recent longitudinal studies of reading acquisition have demonstrated that the acquisition of phonemic awareness is highly predictive of success in learning to read - in particular in predicting success in learning to decode" (IRA Board of Directors, 1998, pg. 6). Blachman found that children who begin school with little phonemic awareness will have trouble aquiring the alphabetic principle which will in turn limit their ability to decode words (Snider, 1995, pg. 3 from Blachman, 1991).

In Learning to Read, Reading to Learn, it was found that most non-readers share a common problem: they have not developed the capacity to recognize phonemes. Accomplished readers are able to recognize phonemes and put them together to construct words and phrases. Children lacking this linguistic skill have difficulty decoding and reading single words, sentences, paragraphs and stories (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996). The evidence reveals that phonemic awareness can significantly bridge the critical gap between inadequate preparation for literacy and success in beginning reading (Fitzpatrick, 1997).

Summary

This paper analyzed how phonemic awareness works to facililitate reading acquisition. Our literature review has proven that phonemic awareness is an essential element in the path to literacy. Without this understanding about spoken language,

students will have have difficulty with the alphabetic principle and the letter-sound correspondences (phonics), all of which are necessary for success in reading.

Implications

Reading acquisition is a process that involves several stages. Each stage can and should be developed in both the classroom and home environment. Because phonemic awareness is an oral skill, instruction must be explicit. There are many ways to incorporate it into the Language Arts curriculum. Rhyming, songs, riddles, alliterations, and segmentation of words are all examples of activities that enhance phonemic awareness. For a child who lacks phonemic awareness, phonics only or a Whole Language reading program will fail. Without phonemic awareness, children will not learn how to read. This is why a balanced reading program is so important.

REFERENCES

Adams, M. (1990). Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print. Cambridge, MA: Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc.

Fitzpatrick, J. (1997). Phonemic Awareness Playing with Sounds to Strengthen Beginning Reading Skills. Cypress, CA: Creative Teaching Press, Inc.

Griffith, P. & Olson, M. (1992). Phonemic Awareness Helps Beginning Readers Break the Code. Reading Teacher, 45(7), 516-523.

International Reading Association Board of Directors. (1998). Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading A Position Statement from the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association. Newark, Del.

National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators. (1996) Learning to Read, Reading To Learn: Helping Children with Learning Disabilities To Succeed. Eugene, OR.

Sensenbaugh, R. (1996). Phonemic Awareness: An Important Early Step in Learning to Read. Bloomington, IN. (ERIC Digest: Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, No. ED 400 530).

Snider, V. (1995). A Primer on Phonemic Awareness: What it is, why it's important, and how to teach it. School Psychology Review, 24(3), 443-455.

Wilson, S. (1998). Phonemic Awareness: A Review of Literature. Paper for California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 416 462).